

Jesus *in* Jerusalem



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 19:28–40, Zech. 9:9, Luke 19:45–48, Matt. 21:12–17, Luke 20:9–26.*

Memory Text: “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it” (*Luke 19:41, NKJV*).

The last week of Jesus' earthly life unfolded in Jerusalem. What tumultuous events marked that week too: the triumphal entry; Jesus weeping over the indifferent city; the cleansing of the temple; the scheming and the plotting against Him; the pathos of the Last Supper and the agony of Gethsemane; the mockery of a trial; the Crucifixion; and, finally, the Resurrection. Never before and never since has any city witnessed so critical a progression of history, one that brought the cosmic conflict between good and evil to its climax, even though no one but Jesus understood the significance of what was unfolding.

Jesus had passed through Jerusalem several times in His life. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all record Jesus as an adult visiting Jerusalem, though mostly during the Passion Week. Although other appearances of Jesus in Jerusalem are well-known—the infant Jesus being brought to the temple (*Luke 2:22–38*), the debate of the 12-year-old in the temple (*vss. 41–50*), the tempter taking Jesus to the highest point of the temple (*Luke 4:9–13*)—it is the closing week of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem that occupies the special attention of the Gospel writers.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 20.

The Triumphal Entry

He was born in Bethlehem. He grew up in Nazareth. He taught, preached, and healed throughout Galilee, Samaria, Judea, and Perea. But one city held His constant focus: Jerusalem. Jesus “steadfastly set His face to go to” the city (*Luke 9:51, NKJV*). His entry into the city marked the most dramatic and crucial week in world history. The week began with Christ’s kingly march into the city and saw His death on the cross, by which we who were enemies “were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (*Rom. 5:10, NKJV*).

Read *Luke 19:28–40*. Imagine the excitement of the disciples. They must surely have thought that at this time King Jesus would ascend to an earthly throne at Jerusalem, the throne of King David. What important lesson about false expectations can we take from this account?

When Jesus was born, wise men from the East came knocking at the doors of Jerusalem, asking that poignant question: “‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?’” (*Matt. 2:2, NKJV*). And now, a few days before the Cross, as His disciples and the multitudes thronged the city, an acclaim burst across Jerusalem’s sky: “‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (*Luke 19:38, NKJV*).

This amazing scene fulfilled prophecy. “‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey’” (*Zech. 9:9, NKJV*). Yet, Jesus knew that this march of history, which began with the shouts of Hosanna, would soon wind up on Golgotha, where He would utter those triumphant words, “‘It is finished.’”

Though it was all according to God’s eternal plan, His disciples were so caught up in the traditions and teachings and expectations of their own time and culture that they completely missed His earlier warnings about what would take place and what it all meant.

Christ spoke to them, but they didn’t listen. Or maybe they listened, but what He said went so much against what they expected that they blocked it out. How can we make sure we aren’t doing the same thing when it comes to biblical truth?

Jerusalem: Cleansing the Temple

“It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves” (*Luke 19:46*).

After the triumphal entry, during which Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the first thing He did was to go to the temple.

Read *Luke 19:45–48, Matthew 21:12–17, and Mark 11:15–19. What important lessons can we take away from what Jesus had done? What should these accounts say to us as individuals and as members of a community that, in a way, functions like the temple? Eph. 2:21.*

All four Gospels mention the cleansing of the temple. While John speaks of the first cleansing (*John 2:13–25*) taking place during Jesus’ visit to the temple at the Passover of A.D. 28, others narrated the second cleansing at the end of Jesus’ ministry, this time at the Passover of A.D. 31. Thus, the two cleansings of the temple provided a parenthesis to the ministry of Jesus, showing how much He cared for the sanctity of the temple and its services, and how strategically He asserted His Messianic mission and authority.

His actions in the temple, especially the second time, which came just before His death, present an interesting question: Knowing that He was soon to die, knowing that the temple and its services would soon become null and void, Jesus nevertheless drove out those who were profaning it with their wares. Why did He not simply leave it alone, in its own corruption, especially since it would not only become unnecessary but, within a generation, would be destroyed?

Though we are not given an answer, it’s most likely because it was still God’s house, and it was still the place where the plan of salvation was revealed. In a sense one could argue that, with His upcoming death, the temple and its services served an important function in that they were the place to help faithful Jews come to understand just who Jesus was and what His death on the cross really meant. That is, the temple, which depicted the entire plan of salvation, could help many come to see in Jesus the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8*).

The Unfaithful

The parable of the wicked vinedressers (*Luke 20:9–19*) gives us a lesson in redemptive history. The center of that history is God and His continual love for erring sinners. Although the parable was specifically addressed to the Jewish leaders of His time (“they knew He had spoken this parable against them” [*vs. 19, NKJV*]), it is timeless in its reach. It applies to every generation, every congregation, and every person on whom God’s love and trust have been poured out and from whom God expects a faithful return. We are today’s tenants, and we can draw from this parable some lessons on history as God views it.

Read *Luke 20:9–19*. How does the principle taught here apply to us, if we make the same mistakes as those in the parable?

Instead of giving to God the fruits of love and fidelity, the tenants of God’s vineyard forsook and failed God. But God, as the owner of the vineyard, sent servant after servant (*vss. 10–12*), prophet after prophet (*Jer. 35:15*) in persistent love to woo and win His people to their responsibility of stewardship. Each prophet, though, became a victim of rejection. “ ‘Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?’ ” (*Acts 7:52, NKJV*).

Divine history is a long love story. Tragedy will raise its head again and again, but glory will eventually triumph. Resurrection must follow the Cross. The stone that was rejected is now the cornerstone of a great temple that will house the commonwealth of God, where all the redeemed, the rich and the poor, the Jew and the Gentile, the male and the female, will live as one people. They shall walk in the eschatological vineyard and enjoy its fruit forever.

We might not have living prophets today to persecute, but we are just as capable of rejecting God’s messengers as were people of old. How can we make sure that we, who have been called to give the Lord “the fruit of the vineyard,” do not reject these messengers and their messages?

God Versus Caesar

Read Luke 20:20–26. How do we take what Jesus taught here and apply it to our own situation in whatever country we live?

During the time of Jesus, taxation by Rome was a volatile issue. Around A.D. 6, according to Josephus, Judas the Galilean, a revolutionary leader, declared that paying taxes to Caesar was treason against God. The issue, along with several Messianic claims and aspirants, set off periodic anti-Roman revolts. Against such a sensitive background, the question put before Jesus about whether it was lawful to pay taxes revealed the ulterior motive of the interrogators: to answer that it was lawful would have placed Jesus on the side of Rome, showing that He could not be the king of the Jews as declared by the crowds at His entry into Jerusalem; to say No would have meant that Jesus was following the Galilean mood and declaring the Roman rule unlawful, opening Himself to the charge of treason. They had hoped to put Jesus in a bind from which He couldn't escape.

Jesus, though, saw right through them. He pointed to the image of Caesar on a coin and pronounced His verdict: “ ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's’ ” (*Luke 20:25, NKJV*). Living under Caesar, whose currency is used for day-to-day necessities, has its obligation to Caesar. But then there is another obligation, a greater one, which rises from the fact that we are made in the image of God and that to Him we owe our ultimate allegiance.

“Christ's reply was no evasion, but a candid answer to the question. . . . He declared that since they were living under the protection of the Roman power, they should render to that power the support it claimed, so long as this did not conflict with a higher duty. But while peaceably subject to the laws of the land, they should at all times give their first allegiance to God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 602.

What are ways we can continue to be good citizens in whatever country we live, while at the same time knowing that our true citizenship exists in a city “whose builder and maker is God” (*Heb. 11:10*)?

The Lord's Supper

Read Luke 22:13–20. What is the significance of the Lord's Supper taking place at the Passover?

Jesus founded the Lord's Supper against the historic context of the Passover feast. The Passover setting underscores human impotence in contrast to God's great power. It was as impossible for Israel to free itself from Egyptian bondage as it is for us to free ourselves from the consequences of sin. Liberation came from God as a gift of His love and grace, and this is the lesson Israel was to teach its children from generation to generation (*Exod. 12:26, 27*). Just as the liberation of Israel was so rooted in history by the redeeming act of God, so the liberation of humanity from sin is grounded in the historic event of the Cross. Indeed, Jesus is our "paschal lamb" (*see 1 Cor. 5:7*), and His Last Supper is "a proclaiming act wherein the community in faith gives expression to the glorious and decisive significance of the death of Christ."—G. C. Berkouwer, *The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), p. 193.

The Lord's Supper is a reminder that "on the same night in which He was betrayed" (*1 Cor. 11:23, NKJV*), on the night before He was crucified, Jesus gave a solemn message to His disciples that they needed to remember: the bread and the wine are symbols of His body, which was about to be broken, and of His blood, which was about to be shed for the remission of sins (*see Matt. 26:28*). The death of Jesus was God's sole means for our Redemption from sin. Lest we forget that the death of Jesus is heaven's provision for our salvation, Jesus ordained the Lord's Supper and commanded that it be kept until He returns (*1 Cor. 11:24–26*).

Jesus' assertion that His blood was to be "shed for many for the remission of sins" (*Matt. 26:28, NKJV*) is to be remembered even to the end of history. To ignore this assertion and choose any other means of salvation is to deny God and His chosen method of salvation.

Two crucial lessons (of many) stand out. "Christ died for us" is the first lesson to be remembered at the table of the Lord. The second lesson is that we sit as one body because of that death, which has brought us all into one fellowship. Even as we sit at the table, we sit as Christ's redeemed community of the end time, awaiting the Lord's return. Until then, the table of the Lord is a reminder that history has meaning and life has hope.

Christ gave His body and blood in order to give you the promise of eternal life. How can you personalize this amazing truth in a way that will constantly give you hope and assurance?

Further Study: “To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour, believing that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. It is by beholding His love, by dwelling upon it, by drinking it in, that we are to become partakers of His nature. What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 389.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Consider the scenes in which Jesus cleansed the temple. In what ways can we put our faith and fidelity on sale? How can religion be used for profit, prestige, and position? More important, how can we as a church make sure we don’t fall into the same deception?
- ② Atheist writer Alex Rosenberg believes that all reality, all existence, is purely materialistic. That is, everything can and must be explained through physical processes and *only* physical processes. These processes are, of course, without design, goals, purposes, or God. “What is the purpose of the universe?” he asks. “There is none. What purposes are at work in the universe? Same answer: none.” If, though, the meaninglessness and purposelessness of the universe make you depressed, Rosenberg warns against taking your “depression seriously.” Why? Because our emotions, including depression, are nothing but specific arrangements of neurons and chemicals, and what’s so serious about that? Rosenberg, however, does have an answer for those discouraged by the meaninglessness of their lives. Because depression is merely a particular configuration of neurons, simply rearrange the neurons—and you can do this with pharmaceuticals. “If you don’t feel better in the morning . . . or three weeks from now, switch to another one. Three weeks is often how long it takes serotonin reuptake suppression drugs like Prozac, Wellbutrin, Paxil, Zoloft, Celexa, or Luvox to kick in. And if one doesn’t work, another one probably will.” The amazing thing about his answer is that he is serious: if depressed, take drugs. Contrast this view of life with what we believe regarding Jesus Christ and what He has done for us on the cross. Why, in a very real sense, is our participation in the Lord’s Supper an open and defiant refutation of the nihilism and meaninglessness presented by Rosenberg and his atheism?

Fighting With Shadows: Part 2

ABBA, MONGOLIA

“My friend, Daba, had gone to Ulaanbaatar to work, and there he became a Christian. When he returned home, he tried talking with me. Because we were friends, I listened to his advice and nodded my head; but in my heart, I was making fun of what he was saying. I thought his belief in God was foolish.

“Daba learned that some Christians were meeting nearby, and he invited me to go with him to the meeting. I went out of respect for Daba, but I was embarrassed to go to a Christian meeting. They talked about God, and I remembered that I had a New Testament at home. Afterward, I found it and began reading, but it didn’t make sense to me. Byra, the leader of the Christian group, offered to explain the Bible passages to me.

“A few weeks later, Daba invited me to a Bible study group on Saturday. I decided to go. Daba wasn’t an Adventist, but the home Bible study group was the only Christian meeting in the village, and he was eager for Christian fellowship. The morning I attended, the speaker talked about God’s love, and somehow the message got through to me. I saw in my mother’s love for me a reflection of God’s love. Even when I came home drunk and she scolded me, she was still there to encourage and help me.

“I continued attending the Bible study group. As Byra explained different Bible passages, the Bible began to make sense to me. I began reading the Bible because I wanted to, not because I felt I should. Soon I could not stop reading it, and I gave my heart to God.

“Over the years, I had promised myself many times that I would stop drinking, but I was never able to stop. Daba told me to pray and ask God for the strength. When I started praying, all my old drinking friends left town. God took them away so they wouldn’t influence me. Then he took away the desire to drink and delivered me from the chains of alcohol. My mother and sisters are amazed. They see how God is changing my life, and they ask many questions about my faith in God. Before I met Christ, fighting, drinking, and stealing were my life. But when I met Jesus, I realized that nothing in my heart was good. I asked God to give me a clean heart, a clean life, and now I long to spend time with Him. I confess, truly confess, that those times I hurt others by my words or my actions were wrong and bad. I don’t ever want to do those things again. By God’s grace I am a changed man.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to grow in Mongolia as more people come to learn about God through the witness of those who have given their lives to Him. Thank you for supporting mission.

Adapted from a story by Charlotte Ishkanian.